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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

5 December 1967

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: Chinese and Soviet Reactions to the Likelihood  
of Communist Failure in South Vietnam

1. In this memorandum we assume that Hanoi anticipates failure of the Communist effort in South Vietnam because of the continued attrition of military and political capabilities. In this circumstance Hanoi might choose to terminate the war, with or without negotiations, or seek additional outside help. We examine below the probable Chinese and Soviet attitudes in such a situation.

China

2. Peking has a primary interest in the preservation of the Communist regime in North Vietnam. It also has a considerable stake in an outcome of the war which would demonstrate the validity of "national liberation struggles" in Southeast Asia. The Chinese are prepared to exert considerable pressure on Hanoi

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S-E-C-R-E-T

S-E-C-R-E-T

and to increase military and economic assistance in order to sustain Hanoi's will and ability to prolong the war in the south. If requested, the Chinese would also be willing to station combat troops in North Vietnam to make additional Vietnamese available for infiltration to the South and to assist, if necessary, in preserving internal security.

3. Even so, Peking is not committed to a Communist success in South Vietnam at any price. The Chinese have allowed themselves room in their public position to accept failure of the military effort in the South. If, in the end, the situation there could only be saved by use of Chinese ground combat troops against US forces, we feel that Peking's fear of major hostilities with the US would be the deciding factor. Rather than accept this risk, and even in the unlikely event that Hanoi urged direct Chinese intervention, we believe that Peking would accept a termination of the fighting. The setback would be attributed to deviations from Maoist doctrines and to Soviet perfidy.

4. As an alternative to direct intervention in South Vietnam the Chinese might consider a diversionary effort in Laos to relieve pressures in South Vietnam and confront the US

- 2 -

S-E-C-R-E-T

S-E-C-R-E-T

with the prospects of a wider war. A small number of Chinese forces could be introduced into Laos clandestinely. From Peking's standpoint, however, an intervention in Laos on a scale likely to make much impact on the deteriorating situation in South Vietnam would incur the same risks of US counteraction as would direct intervention in South Vietnam. Thus, we think the Laotian move would be an unlikely one for the Chinese to try.

5. Should the US extend ground operations to North Vietnam, we think the Chinese reaction would depend on Peking's view of the extent and nature of the threat this action presented to the Hanoi regime itself. If Peking judged that the threat to Hanoi was not critical, e.g., if it involved only a US landing just north of the DMZ to outflank the NVA troops there, the initial Chinese military reaction would probably be limited to a rapid and conspicuous buildup of combat forces in South China and perhaps in the northern parts of North Vietnam as well. This action would be accompanied by strong verbal warnings.

6. On the other hand, if the Chinese perceived US actions as directly threatening the existence of the Communist regime in North Vietnam, and estimated that their intervention was

- 3 -

S-E-C-R-E-T

S-E-C-R-E-T

necessary to preserve that regime, we believe that they would use their own ground forces to engage US forces in North Vietnam.

7. Like most estimates concerning Chinese actions the foregoing must be qualified because of the uncertain situation in Peking. We cannot be sure what the impact of the internal struggle has had or will have on Chinese policies. It is conceivable that in some circumstances a foreign war might appear to certain leaders or factions as a way out of a political impasse. It seems more likely, however, that the Chinese leadership would seek to avoid a major external crisis so long as internal affairs remain in disarray.

#### The USSR


8. The USSR's stake in the war in South Vietnam rests on considerations different from those influencing Peking. The Soviets do not have a security interest of their own in the area as do the Chinese, but have been concerned primarily to preserve their claims to leadership of the Communist movement. At present the Soviet leaders probably think that a military victory by either side is not possible. They probably prefer a political settlement to the uncertainties and risks of a protracted struggle.

S-E-C-R-E-T

If Hanoi itself chose to seek such a settlement or to quietly liquidate the conflict we believe that Moscow would accept such action.

9. If Hanoi remained determined to fight on despite failing prospects and requested still more assistance, Moscow would probably feel compelled to respond. But the response would still be conditioned by Soviet concern to limit the risks of enlarging the war. Thus, Moscow might provide more sophisticated weapons for the defense of North Vietnam, and non-nuclear weapons with additional range and fire power which would be employed against US forces and bases from positions north of the DMZ. Moscow might accompany these moves with a far tougher stand in all its relations with the US, and generally create an atmosphere of tension designed to pressure the US into a more flexible posture in Vietnam. But we do not believe that the USSR, merely to prevent a Communist defeat in South Vietnam, would be willing to become involved directly in the fighting or to encourage high risk diversions in Korea, Berlin, or elsewhere.

FOR THE BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES:

  
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